

The
spirit
of
water

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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring
religion through the worship of
God and the celebration of life; the
service of humanity and respect for
all creation; and the upholding of the
liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
Free Christian Churches 2001*

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Editor M Colleen Burns MA
46A Newmarket Road
Cringleford
Norwich NR4 6UF
ph: 01603 505281

e: inquirer@btinternet.com

Copyeditor Sarah Reynolds

Cover: Waterfall at Plitvice lakes, a
World Natural Heritage site in Croatia.
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Cheques payable to 'The Inquirer'.
Write to James Barry

24 Lodge Lane
Keymer, Hassocks
West Sussex, BN6 8NA
ph: 01273 844940

e: inquirersubs@gmail.com

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Find out more about Unitarians
www.unitarian.org.uk

or email info@unitarian.org.uk
The General Assembly, Essex Hall
1-6 Essex Street
London WC2R 3HY
ph: 0207 2402384



Photo by Nauris Paulins

Inquiring Words

Harvest

*On fields o'er which the reaper's hand has pass'd
Lit by the harvest moon and autumn sun,
My thoughts like stubble floating in the wind
And of such fineness as October airs,
There after harvest could I glean my life
A richer harvest reaping without toil,
And weaving gorgeous fancies at my will
In subtler webs than finest summer haze.*

– Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

Clarification

An advert in the 3 August of *The Inquirer*, seeking a manager and custodian for the Haughland House retreat centre at Shapinsay, Orkney, should not have referred to the position as a 'job'. The advertiser has since learnt that because the position is voluntary, the word 'job' should not have been used to describe it. For more information about Haughland House, see: www.orkneyretreat.org.uk/



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Finding water within and without

Digging for a spring in the dry hills of Spain reminded **Art Lester** of the spiritual power of water, and the inner quest for renewal.

It's not surprising that most of the spiritual influences that have formed us have sprung from the desert places. They have made copious use of water as a spiritual metaphor. Taking just the three 'Religions of the Book' – Judaism, Christianity and Islam, we can see dozens of images of drought and water as representing the secular and spiritual worlds. Moses struck the rock at Horah and brought forth a stream of living water in the desert; Jesus stood waste deep in the holy Jordan for his baptism; the Islamic conception of Paradise is – what else? – an oasis.

Jacob Trapp, in his essay 'Primitive Religion: Return to the Springs', speaks of finding fresh outpourings of water for the renewal of the spiritual life. This becomes necessary when – as happens from time to time – the truths of one generation become the absurdities of the next. When a vision is provided through the spiritual insight of a Jesus or a Muhammad, the waters of that vision will be developed by devotees, made into ornate fountains, landscaped and elaborated until the freshness of the spring and the water it produces are spoiled.

Like truth, water is a constant

The wetness of the water remains: truth is – after all – truth, but in terms of their usefulness in quenching spiritual thirst, you might say that springs run dry. This happens in real springs and it does in metaphorical ones as well. Throughout the long, dry Spanish valley where my wife Gilly and I have a cottage, can be seen dead villages, built up when there was a trickle of water for irrigation and household use, and then abandoned when the spring dried up. The villages lie white and empty on the dry hills, like so many failed empires and religions.

Some years ago, I needed to find a source of water for my land and, in doing that, I learned a few things about springs. First, they appear in surprising ways. Because we cannot see beneath the soil to the deep structure of the earth below, we can only imagine what happens there. The connection to the spiritual life and trying to fathom God, the Universe and Everything is like that as well. I have watched 'water witches' – as diviners are often called – find water through the use of forked sticks and bent copper wire. This was – of course – what Moses did in the wilderness. Some people seem to have this ability, and I couldn't care less what the sceptics say – I've seen it. The only difficulty is in knowing which diviner is reliable and which is not. Sometimes you can't spot a charlatan until you have dug a 30-metre well to no avail; the water witch



Water goes its own way: The city of Fatepur Sikri, built by the Emperor Akbar in Rajasthan, highlighted his dream of religious harmony and includes symbols from the major world faiths. It was abandoned 12 years after it was completed in 1573 because there was no reliable water source. Photo by Debabrata Ghosh via Wikimedia Commons

will be in the next town by then, and you'll still have no water to drink. There are gurus, priests and prophets that are like that, too.

The earth reveals its secrets

As I looked for water, I found that there are clues given off by the earth for the truly observant. There was a patch near the path at the top of my land that was almost damp. Ivy grew there, just a few feet from prickly pears and sisal plants. No water was reaching the surface, but the roots of the ivy – ingenious and tenacious – were finding it. I dug a bit and found mud, then dug a bit more and found actual signs of water oozing from it. Then, encouraged, I dug a lot more, and hit dry patches. I would have to change my method. I did, several times. Finally I began smashing bits of rock on a small shelf in front of me, and water began to pour over my hands with the force of a bathroom tap on half-volume. I can't tell you how I felt then, but it seemed to me like a miracle. In Spain, springs are called *nacimientos* or 'births'. It was just like that.

There are some clues that life itself gives for the seeker of spiritual springs, and they are remarkably similar. The first is this: look in the damp and muddy places first.

Our own damp places, too

These are places within us that have about them a sense of emotional dampness. They are sometimes the points of old wounds, old fears, old undigested grief. They are not clean and dry like so much of our lives. They might be places of embarrassment, of secrecy and denial. They might be the site of seemingly untenable desires or frightening images. They are too muddy for walking in very often. And yet it is in these very places – the ignored and avoided regions of the self – where renewal often begins. Sometimes this happens accidentally, when life thrusts upon us new challenges and we find ourselves in deep mud without having planned it. Sometimes – rarely – a person will take a conscious journey

(Continued on next page)

Be like water

Be Like Water

run deep run clear

fill any space to its own dimensions

respond to the moon, to gravity

change colours with the light

hold your temperature longer than the surrounding
air

take the coast by storm

go under ground

bend light

be the one thing people need, even when they're
fasting

eat boulders, quietly

be a universal solvent

-The Rev Kendra Ford

Water will always go its own way

(Continued from previous page)

into the damplands of the soul to find meaning when life in the sun is too dry for nourishment. More often we are content to live with too little spiritual water if it means the challenge of the search in damp ground. It is in this way that the drying up of old sources of meaning ultimately benefit us by driving us forward in the search for new springs and new dispensations of an old truth.

Water has not interest in you

To get at the water of life, you'll have to dig, ruin your fingernails and sprain your back. It will fool you: there are a lot of false turnings and dead ends. A perfectly logical thing for the water to do is not what it seems to do. It will run around objects and hide itself with seemingly cruel caprice. You can find a trickle; put your pickaxe into it only to find it has disappeared. You can go two-feet uphill of a small rivulet and dig all the way to Chicago and the stream just won't be there. The water is where it is, and it has no interest in your inclinations or theories. With springs it is 'take it or leave it.' Moses may have been able to do it with one smack of his walking stick, but I suspect there were a few sweaty Israelites who had to dig awhile in those days, too.

We may have all sorts of complicated plans for the water that we find – actual and metaphorical. But I found by working with actual springs that the water has its own sense of purpose and that we are much better off adapting ourselves to it than trying to bend it to our will. Better to find a cool place in the rocks where you can dip your hand and drink when you need to than

to exhaust yourself with pipes and pumps. This is something we could all learn, to our profit, and there's no better teacher than a little flow of water. Springs can be developed, water can be bottled, fountains can be built, but water, like the spirit, comes and goes in its own time and its own way.

Maybe looking out at the moistened landscape of England erodes the power of this metaphor. But we are all pilgrims, sandal-slapping our way across a long stretch of desert, and we need a spring of cool water, too. Because the journey is long, we may be tempted to stay too long by an old fountain, even though its waters have long ago run out for us. We have reason to believe – both because we are told by the great voices of spiritual history and because something prompts us from within – that we may find new springs and new sources of meaning for our lives. There is in us an awareness of how we are equipped to search for and find that which we need.

Visions cannot become rituals

Visions come and go – they flow literally as the water. Because we are human, we may try to institutionalise – to trap – these visions, to make of them codes and rituals, and thereby rob them of their freshness. But the impudent promptings of the spirit will send us on our way again, looking for and finding fresh sources of living water.

When this water is found we may discover how great our thirst has really been, and then we may drink deep for a long, long time.

Maybe forever.

The Rev Art Lester is minister at Croydon.

Online archives hold Unitarian history

By Kate Taylor

Much of Unitarians' history as a movement is to be found in the amazing resource of some 270 key texts made available on line, free of charge, via the General Assembly's document library. They range from books written more than 200 years ago to last year's Annual Report and include 58 of the Essex Hall lectures.

Alan Ruston, President of the Unitarian Historical Society, says, 'To have easy access to key historical works on your computer at home is a remarkable development. It is now no longer necessary to attempt to collect those rare books on our history – so much is there in the General Assembly document library, a superb resource for anyone with an interest in Unitarian history.'

Among the earliest works are *The History of the Corruption of Christianity* by Joseph Priestley, published in 1871 and *Memoirs of Theophilus Lindsey*, first printed in 1812.

The Essex Hall lectures reflect the thought of leading liberals – religious and secular – from 1893 onwards. There are 58 of them currently in the library. They include 'Theology and English Poetry' by Stopford A Brooke (1893), 'Some phases of free thought in England in the 19th Century' delivered in 1925 by Herbert Henry Asquith

(the first Earl of Oxford and Asquith), 'Christianity Then and Now' (Philip Toynbee, 1979), 'Blasphemy' (Louis Blom-Cooper QC, 1981), and 'Hoping for a Future' (Martin Palmer, 1990).

The work of scanning, and cleaning the images has been done by James Barry, an IT consultant and member of the Unitarian General Assembly's Executive Committee. He is permanently in quest for additional texts and this summer raided the Reverend Andrew Hill's collection in York for another 38 items.

Perhaps readers may hold some of the missing Essex Hall lectures. James is looking particularly for those delivered in 1953-56, 1958-60, and 1963-66.

Students for the Unitarian ministry are finding the resource particularly helpful. Matthew Smith, in his final year of training at Harris Manchester College, Oxford, says, 'There's a wonderful range of material now online. Whether its worship material now out of print, biographical material about famous Unitarians of the past or historic lectures, there are nuggets here that are a real help for ministry students like me.'

The library can be found at www.unitarian.org.uk/docs/index.php

Kate Taylor is a member of the Wakefield congregation.



James Barry scans Unitarian texts at Essex Hall. Digitised copies are available online. Photo by Kate Taylor

Images of chapels on UHS website

By Alan Ruston

The Rev Keith Gilley, who died earlier this year, was editor of *The Inquirer* from 1986 to 2003. From the late 1960s he fostered a considerable interest in Unitarian churches and chapels by photographing them whenever he went to conduct a service, or, when editor, as a member of the congregation for his *Visitor for Worship* column that was published in *The Inquirer* for many years. His photographic collection was also historic and included pictures of chapels long-since disappeared.

Housed in two large box files these have now been deposited at Harris Manchester College Oxford for retention and inspection by those who are seeking an image. Before taking them to the College, I extracted a representative number and scanned them onto my computer. These have now found their way onto the www.unitarianhistory.org.uk website (under *Images*). For England there are 194 images. Scottish, Welsh and Irish chapel images mainly come from other photographers. It's the largest website collection of pictures of dissenting chapels of which I know.

www.unitarianhistory.org.uk is the website maintained by



Historical and modern images are available at the Unitarian History Society website. This one is of the Chowbent Chapel, Atherton.

the Unitarian Historical Society and contains a great deal of material for those interested in the story of our chapels. If your chapel is not shown, post me a photo via Essex Hall, or email it to inquirer@btinternet.com and I'll ensure that it appears on the next revision of the site.

Alan Ruston is president of the Unitarian Historical Society.

An oasis between book covers

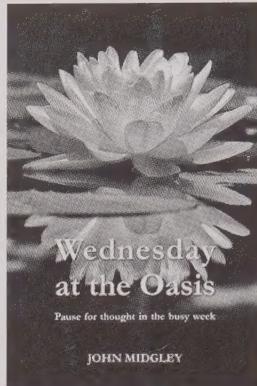
By Bill Darlison

When John Midgley was minister in Cross Street Chapel in the heart of Manchester, he conducted a midweek service in which he tried to provide busy workers with some respite from the noise and feverish activity of city life. He called this 'a spiritual oasis in the heart of the city', and as part of the service he would usually give a mini sermon, an informal reflection (lasting I would assume about 7 minutes), on topical subjects, news items, perennial human predilections, and the festivals and feast days of the Christian calendar. *Wednesday at the Oasis* is a collection of 52 of these pieces, one for each week of the year, starting with reflections on the New Year, covering Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Easter Sunday, All Saints' Day, St. Cecilia's Day, and ending with a few thoughts on Christmas and its attendant traditions.

Interspersed among these calendrical reflections are John's thoughts on people as different as Guru Nanak and Peter Ustinov, and subjects as diverse as pretzels and plastic.

It's a delightful collection, full of the kind of gentle wisdom we have all come to associate with John. It is accessible, humorous, informative, thought-provoking and, at times, challenging. It's full of interesting snippets of information, like the fact that the first day of Lent in the Orthodox tradition is not Ash Wednesday but Clean Monday; that the eminent religious scholar SGF Brandon had no appreciation of music; that a variety of holly is used to make tea in South America.

What informs the whole collection is John's conviction that religion does not have to concern itself exclusively (or even mainly) with complex and unfathomable theological and philosophical problems, but that it can be found in the everyday events of life, even in activities as commonplace as shaving or showering or travelling on a bus.



In one of my favourite passages, he tells how the Unitarian Universalist minister Carl Scovel noticed a sign in a little Franciscan church in Nazareth which read 'No explanations in church', which was simply intended to dissuade tour guides from speaking too loudly, but which Scovel said should be 'nailed to the lectern of every pulpit in America' in order to dissuade preachers from killing the beauty and truth of every great story and text by giving tedious, 'damn fool' explanations of them. 'If you would know God,' says Kahlil Gibran, 'be not therefore a solver of riddles'. John says that he (like most preachers, I suppose) has a tendency to be riddle solver, but he also knows what it means to 'set aside the urge to analyse and explain everything, and simply respond to life and its meaningful experiences, without picking the meaning to pieces'.

And that sums up this volume very neatly. It is John Midgley's response to the ordinary experiences of his life. It can be used in a number of ways: as a source of readings for Sunday worship, as a manual to aid personal meditation, or as a discussion starter. But, most important of all, it can encourage the reader to reflect on his or her own life and to realise, as John does, that it's when we pay close attention to the world about us that we encounter the divine.

I enjoyed this book immensely and recommend it wholeheartedly.

'Wednesday at the Oasis: Pause for Thought in the Busy Week' is by the Rev John Midgley, published by Lensden Publishing, 2013. It is available for £8.99 + £2.50 p&p from the Rev John Midgley, 2 Hirds Yard, Skipton, North Yorkshire, BD23 2AF. Cheques payable to J Midgley. ISBN-10: 0957589107

Bill Darlison is a retired Unitarian minister.

Thinking of training for the Unitarian ministry or lay pastorate?

Applications for training beginning in autumn 2014 should be received by Monday October 7 2013. Short-listed applicants will be called for interview at Oxford on 2 – 3 January 2014.

For further information please contact:
Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly, Essex Hall,
1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY
Phone: 020 7240 2384
Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk

To discuss applying, please contact:
Rev Linda Phillips

Phone: 020 7240 2384
Email: iphillips@unitarian.org.uk

Excerpt: Don't be a riddle-solver

Playing with the children

An excerpt from 'Wednesday at the Oasis' by John Midgley. See review at left for details.

Several decades ago, in January 1926, a most unusual book was published which has been continuously in print. It is a book that I and many ministers and others have read from, many a time, privately and in worship services. It is called *The Prophet*, written by a Lebanese mystic and poet, Kahlil Gibran. The sequence of its chapters describes the prophet, who has spent many years in a distant land, moving among the people there, teaching them spiritual ways. But now the time has come for him to return to his home. As he makes his way down to the harbour, the people gather around him and ask him to speak to them, one last time. They choose matters that are of concern to them; love and marriage and children, freedom and law and friendship and death and many more. Finally, someone asks him to speak to them of religion.

'Have I spoken this day of aught else?' he replies. 'For is not religion all deeds and all reflection?' And he concludes, 'If you would know God, be not therefore a solver of riddles, rather, look about you, and you shall see him, playing with your children. And look into space, and you shall see him walking in the cloud, outstretching his arms in lightning and descending in rain. You shall see him smiling in flowers, then rising and waving his hands in trees.'

Those words came back to me when my wife and I took a day off to make an excursion out into a small country town in Yorkshire, to relax and look to see if Spring had really ended and Summer arrived. Summer seemed a little reluctant, but then there were some warm sunny spells and we wandered through some parkland alongside a river, then sat on a bench for a while to enjoy it all.

It was then that we heard the sound of children's voices. Looking across the river we could see a small group of about a dozen or more children, playing in and out of the water. There were shouts and screams and squeals of both terror and delight. They were having a wonderful time.

This was clearly a party of schoolchildren aged, I would think, perhaps eight or nine years, with some staff members close by, keeping a careful eye on them.

We chatted about them. 'They must be taking a break from lessons,' we thought. I was a little envious, recalling my own junior school days long ago, in an inner city location. There was no river nearby for us to escape to for such delights and a break from classes.

Or was it? Had the lessons really stopped, or was this a period of what educationalists would call 'informal education'? This is the kind of learning that we are picking up all the time, lessons from life and everyday happenings that are going on all around, constantly.

So, what would those children be learning? That the water looks good and inviting, but in fact is quite cold, hence the squeals as they ran in. That water can be used to frighten others, at least for a moment, hence the screams as they threw scooped handfuls of water at each other. They learned that though the grass is soft to the tread, the stones and pebbles are sharp and painful.

They would be learning, too, about their bodies. They were undressed down to just shorts or bathing costumes. They



Kahlil Gibran at 15. 'You shall see (God) playing with your children'. Photo by Fred Holland Day (US Library of Congress)

would know that some were boys and some were girls; *vive la difference*, perhaps.

Some had white skin, many of them were brown, being of Asian extraction, this part of Yorkshire having a large Asian immigrant community. They would be learning to live as people of mixed colours, together. I wondered if this would be a lesson some of them might forget, later. Or would the fun of throwing water at each other, reduce the likelihood that they would ever want to throw insults, stones or even bombs at each other?

They might notice that the adult women teachers all carefully kept their bodies covered, some with shawls around their hair.

They would learn, too, that other creatures share this planet, as there were mallards and coots in the water with them, and even a large, black-headed gull came to see what the commotion was.

Perhaps they were aware that countless other children in other lands are lucky ever to get clean water to drink, let alone play in.

And they would learn that all good things come to an end, that soon it would be time to be good, get dried and dressed and do as they were told, and go back to... school. Is it 'going back'? I wondered. What, and where is school?

These thoughts imply a broad, liberal view of education, which I am happy to take. Likewise, I am happy to take that broad, liberal view of religion, as 'all deeds and all reflection.'

I wonder if God was playing with those children, down by the river?

Oh, yes, I'm sure *She* was.

Having faith in the street that isn't there

Not long ago my SATNAV went missing. I think it may have been stolen. I had got used to it, even came to love it, especially in our house-hunting days when it proved extremely useful. So I went out and purchased a replacement. I know that many motorists are uneasy about the whole idea, some even suspecting they are operated by the NSA or the CIA or even MI5, but perhaps that's getting a little paranoid. There are countless stories and claims of disastrous mishaps when using SATNAVs. On the outskirts of the town of Todmorden in the heart of West Yorkshire there is a district called, for unaccountable reasons, Portsmouth. A story has it that one day the bewildered Hungarian driver of an enormous articulated wagon got stuck in a narrow side street there, searching for the docks. How do you say, 'Wrong Portsmouth, mate,' in Hungarian?

My new SATNAV has a nice woman's voice, so we call her Sandra. In truth the voice is clearly computer-generated and, like all computers, her brain struggles with the subtleties of the English language. Then again, so do many human beings. A few miles from my home stands the town of Keighley, pronounced 'Keethley'. Poor Sandra cannot manage that, and confused me with her instruction to 'turn right on Kayley Road.' Also, Addingham has become 'a-dingum'. I can forgive her these, but not the time she instructed me to turn left into a non-existent side road.

This near mishap did, however, remind me of a delightful modern folk-song I heard performed by Zoe Mulford a few years ago. She is described as a mid-Atlantic singer-songwriter, spending half of her life in the US where she has Unitarian Universalist connections, and the other half here in the UK where her husband works. She tours folk clubs and festivals and has many CDs and awards to her credit. This particular song claims that devious map-makers have been known to sneak onto a map a street that isn't there. This is to catch out anyone making unauthorised copies of the map and selling them. The song goes on, however, to take a surrealist twist, in which she ends up actually living in the song's title, *The Street That Isn't There*. "You're welcome anytime," she sings, she'll introduce the neighbours, and the kids there play out safely. Perhaps the street is in 'Kaylee', and Sandra the SATNAV was trying to help me to find it. I wish I had.

Had you been driving or, better still, walking down Parish Road in Dorchester, Massachusetts this last August, you would have seen an amazing sight outside the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church. Standing high and lifted up, in what in the US is called a bucket truck, stood the minister, the Rev Arthur Lavoie, offering words of dedication for the beautiful church spire which was



Replacing the spire at First Parish Dorchester, Mass. Photo courtesy of First Parish

Funny Old World

By
John Midgley



being raised up by a giant crane and placed carefully back in its position. This town landmark has been beautifully restored by students of preservation carpentry, and their instructors, from nearby North Bennett School, as part of a long and costly restoration programme for the church. Just below the weather vane on the spire there is a golden ball, into which the minister placed a time capsule.

This work has been paid for partly by the sale of the congregation's communion vessels and other silver items dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries, at Sotheby's in New York, for a breathtaking \$1.7 million. This is something I mentioned in this column last year. I wondered if any of our congregations would ever dare to do likewise with their 'family silver'. In his words of dedication, Arthur Lavoie said, "We are grateful to our forebears whose silver made this restoration possible. May we always know that this building is only a tool to carry on the mission of the church since 1630, to serve the people of Dorchester."

I have a sort of fondness for streets. Four out of the five congregations I served as minister were commonly referred to by the name of the road or street on which they stood, as are many others. There are verses in the Old Testament, in the largely ignored book of *Zechariah*, chapter 8, which describe a vision of a city at peace, with old men and women walking safely in the street, 'each one leaning on their stick, for very age; and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls, playing.' And I respond to the line, 'Peace is the high street in a country town', in John Holmes' hymn *The People's Peace*, in *Hymns for Living* 219. This is partly because of the coincidence that 219 is the number of the house where I was born and brought up, and where I and the other local children played in the street.

We had a selection of street games: 'Tag' (or was it 'Tig'?), 'Aye-ackey 123', and 'Kick the can', the rules of which I think I can still remember. There were established code words that had their special meaning, such as, 'I've got barley!' which meant I've dropped out of the game and can't be touched. And I can just remember the street party outside our house to celebrate the ending of WW2. Do children play in the street today?

Pay it Forward: 'Do it for thee sen'

I recently conducted a funeral for Bill, a member of the Altrincham congregation who had moved to Keswick in the Lake District. Following the service we shared a lovely tea at a local hotel and his friends, family and former colleague Bob shared some beautiful memories about his life. It is obvious he was a greatly loved man.

I sat next to his business partner who shared many tales about his life. Bill used to run a jam making factory and Bob recounted a tale about when they ran out of damsons. He had noted I was from Yorkshire and said that this type of jam was very popular there. Bob recounted how he began the round of calls all over the north of England in a desperate search for extra supplies. Eventually he got through to a firm in Yorkshire which had plenty extra.

Bob thanked the man at the end of the phone adding 'I don't know how or when we will be able to pay you back for this.' To which the man replied, 'Nah then lad, thas no need to pay us back, there's no debt. What I'd like thee to do is pay it forward.'

Bill's business partner explained to me that what the man had wanted him to do was to remember this favour and to pass it on when someone else was in trouble and needs a favour too. He didn't want him to pay it back; he wanted him to pay it forward. This really got me thinking. First of all it exploded one of those myths about Yorkshire folk and especially one of those awful clichés that are said of us. You have no doubt heard this one 'Ear all, see all, say nowt; eyt all, sup all, pay nowt; and if ivver tha does owt fer nowt allus do it fer thissen.' Which roughly translates as 'Hear all, see all, say nothing; eat all, drink all, pay nothing; and if ever you do anything for nothing always do it for yourself.'

The man on the other end of the phone certainly exploded that myth. He didn't want the favour to be paid back; instead it wanted it to be paid forward, to be passed on to the next person in need. Pay it forward is an interesting term, don't you think? There are disagreements over its origins, which may well go back to the ancient Greeks. Luminaries such as Benjamin Franklin and Ralph Waldo Emerson made reference to the principle, although they themselves did not use the phrase. During the 1950s the phrase 'Pay it Forward' was popularised by Robert A Heinlein, initially by being referenced in his book 'Between Planets.' Heinlein preached and practised this principle in his daily life and this led to the formation of the Heinlein society, a humanitarian organisation based on this principle.

In the year 2000 Catherine Ryan Hyde published the novel 'Pay it Forward' which became a best seller and was soon made into a film by the same title. This led, in time, to the formation of the Pay it Forward Foundation. It even has its own day. Did you know that 24 April is 'International Pay It Forward Day'? This is a day when millions of people intentionally commit to acts of kindness and caring. Pay it forward is based on

From Nothing to Everything

by
Danny Crosby



what is known today as the ripple effect, which has its roots in Confucius's concept of 'Concentric Circles of Compassion'.

Like a pebble dropped into a pond, our actions create ripples that go out and affect others beyond what we can imagine. It works on the premise that we can make our world a better place if we share, if we care as much for others as we do for ourselves. It is firmly grounded in the ethos of the Golden Rule of Compassion, a concept found at the core of every single one of the world's great religious traditions. It is an effort to change the world one small act at a time. Everything we do and everything we do not do really does matter. We affect our world, for good or for ill, by every thought, word and or deed. It is easy to look at our world and despair and give up and say, 'What's the point? Everyone is out for themselves. If I go out of my way to help another, they'll just keep on taking advantage and what will I ever get back in return? It's easy to follow the selfish rule, "If tha gunna do owt for nowt, do fir thee sen".'

I believe there is another way; I believe there is a better way. This other way is the purpose of the 'Pay it Forward' movement. I, like them, believe that we can change our world, one act at a time. This is religion in its deepest and simplest form, binding up the broken manifesting God's love in life. At its core is this life-affirming principle that in spite of a great deal of evidence to the contrary faith, hope and love do in fact still remain. You see these ripples can transform all who are touched by them.

I'd like you to do something for me, 'for thee sen', for your world. I'd like you to remember all those times in your life when someone has gone out of their way to help you with no expectation of anything in return; whether they have helped you materially, intellectually, emotionally, or spirituality. I'd like you to re-feel these occasions and to meditate on them and to come up with ways that you can pay these debts forward. I'd like you to think of ways that you can give back to your world; how you can create ripple effects that can impact in our

shared world in ways we perhaps can't even begin to dream of.

We can change our world today; it begins with thee and me. If you can't do it for me, then 'do it for thee sen.'

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Altrincham and Urmston.



PAY IT FORWARD DAY

The next 'Pay it Forward' day, scheduled by the Pay it Forward Foundation is 24 April 2014. For more information, see <http://www.payitforwardfoundation.org/>

Letters to the Editor

Do not bury memory of Cyril Smith

In the introduction to *The Inquirer's* 14 September lead article, we are asked, 'What if someone like (Jimmy Savile) turned up at your church?' I read this the day after the 12 September programme broadcast on Channel 4, researched and presented by Liz MacKean, called *The Paedophile MP: How Cyril Smith Got Away with It*. In her report, Liz MacKean highlighted a clip of the party political broadcast in which Cyril Smith demanded a return to Christian values.

Not only did Cyril Smith come into Unitarian churches, he was opening them! He preached in them.

I have a photograph of my late mother beaming because she was alongside Cyril Smith MP.

None of them knew he might be returning to Rochdale to get his alleged unconsenting sexual fix. I have an account of the service he took that day, this preacher and Member of Parliament, during the period when Special Branch was protecting him against police action. For, unlike Jimmy Savile's case, the police had

information on him, and a local publication and *Private Eye* published details about Cyril Smith. He never sued them.

The service on 22 June 1986 was a straightforward, traditional, Christian service with old fashioned hymns like *The Lord's My Shepherd* and had prayers to think about loved ones and people elsewhere. He linked his political liberalism and his Unitarianism. He came with his Liberal Party agent, a friend and local Methodist preacher, and the latter said they agreed on belief except for the Trinity.

The Liberal Democrats may be erasing him from their history, but this article certainly does the same about Cyril Smith by focusing on the wrong man. The question is not what would be done about the attending abuser who needs to change, but how someone can preach a form of Unitarianism and have a reality that includes the exploitation of the trapped and the unconsenting. Before Unitarians refer to Jimmy Savile, they should ask about one of their own.

Adrian Worsfold

Hull

Inquirer editor: Focus of abuse article was prevention

The Inquirer has come under some criticism for not mentioning Cyril Smith in an article about sex abusers which appeared in the previous issue. In an unforeseen bit of timing, the magazine appeared the same week as a Channel 4 'Dispatches' programme about the late MP and the allegations of his sexual abuse of young boys. The programme also included information which suggested there was a government cover-up of Cyril Smith's wrongdoing, which prevented him being brought to justice.

Cyril Smith was an active and respected Unitarian in the Rochdale area. And there are many Unitarians – including members of his family – who have been deeply hurt by learning of his purported crimes and by the media response.

The Rev Maud Robinson's article did not focus on Jimmy Savile. The disgraced TV star was mentioned – as his case was the impetus for so many that followed. The real focus of the article was about what can be done to keep children and other vulnerable people in our congregations safe, while ministering to all.

There is no effort to hide Cyril Smith. In fact, *The Inquirer* editorialised about him in January. But it is hard to know what a discussion of the details of his case in *The Inquirer* could achieve. The January editorial said the best thing we can do, as Unitarians, is to move forward and work to prevent victimisation. Featuring Maud Robinson's article as a cover story is part of that effort, as is publicising the Safeguarding Policy instituted by the Unitarian General Assembly. (See: <http://bit.ly/1aKTtxS>)

Any thinking person deplores sex abuse. So it is easy to express outrage on behalf of the victims. What is hard, is to do what we can to ensure that no one else is victimised.

MC Burns

Editor, *The Inquirer*

It is not enough to be well-meaning

The Rev Maud Robinson raises an important issue in the 14 September *Inquirer*, but I suspect the remedy she suggests is beyond the competence of most congregations, made up as they usually are of well-meaning people without the professional expertise to deal with a predatory paedophile, well-used to manipulating even those supposedly qualified to handle them. And in my experience, little help is to be had in such matters from prison authorities, social service departments, or mental health bodies, which are jealous of their own domains and have little time for religious organisations. It would be unwise to let kind hearts rule hard heads unless you are very sure of your ground and those you are dealing with are genuinely repentant (yes, that word!) and determined to put their offending behaviour behind them. I'm afraid the liberally minded are sitting ducks unless they can see beyond their troubled consciences and keep their defences raised. Does this mean never opening the door? No, not necessarily, but, by God, you need to know what you're doing before you do! And a truly repentant offender will understand this.

The Rev Cliff Reed

Ipswich

War is always wrong, in spite of the chaplain

To the Editor

Re the Rev George Tyger's *Inquirer* article (31 August) 'How to reconcile faith and war?'

The final sentence is appallingly naive. 'There is nothing in the world I would have rather done that day than rumble down the dirty, ancient, dangerous streets of Kandahar City, building meaning in the midst of war.'

There can be no possible ambivalence for a pacifist like me in defence of the obscenity of war. War kills people. War destroys the planet. War breeds war.

Peter Sampson

Lancaster

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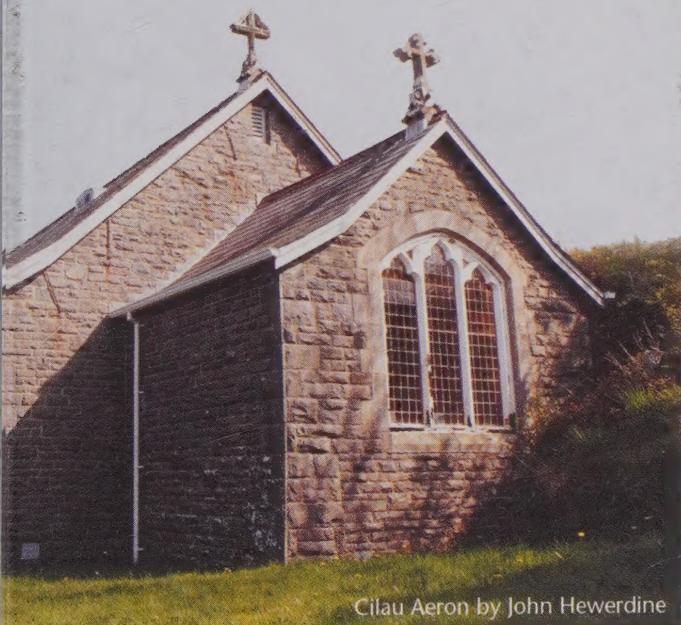
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Prayers sent on the wind at York



The Rev Myrna Michell (right) and chapel visitors holding the Tibetan Prayer Flags, complete with leaves attached.

By Dee Boyle

Is there such a thing as synchronicity, coincidence or other similar experiences that help to shape us and act as reminders – or is it just one of those things that certain events, words we hear or articles that we read, seem to cross our paths?

In the 'Faith in Words' copy of *The Inquirer*, dated 3 August, I read with great interest the film review by the Rev Daniel Costley. It was about the new film regarding Tibet and the plight of the Tibetan people, *When the Dragon Swallowed the Sun*. Earlier that week I had received an email about the various scheduled showings of this same film and hoped to go along. On the Sunday following this, the theme of the service at the Unitarian Chapel in St Saviourgate, York was 'Prayers in the Wind' featuring Tibetan prayer flags. The Rev Myrna

Michell had invited two friends to the service who had recently returned from a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash in Tibet. They spoke about their trip and also about how, in Tibetan Buddhism, the meaning of prayer flags is not for personal benefit but to send prayers out to all sentient beings, everywhere.

Tibetan prayer flags hung from the trees and blew in the wind outside the church as members of the congregation arrived for the service. Inside the Chapel were various prayer flags and smaller ones with 'Om Mani Padme Hum' (a mantra/prayer) written on them. Our visitors spoke about some of the other methods that Tibetans use for their prayers like Prayer Wheels, and Mani stones and how the prayers in and on each of these items go out into the air so that the prayers reach everyone in the world. They also told us about the significance of the colours on the flags and their relevance to the five elements.

As the service came to an end, we all sat in silent reflection, each holding a leaf that the children had given out, thinking of our own prayers that we would like to send out to the world. Everyone then attached their leaves to a line of Tibetan Prayer flags stretching from front to back of the Chapel. These flags were then taken home, to hang them in a garden and let all our prayers go out into the ether and hopefully reach all the sentient beings that they were intended for.

It is quite amazing that, from a people with their own troubles to contend with, there comes a simple and yet symbolic means of encouraging us to think of others, pray for others and share in the practice of sending our prayers out on the wind. Was it synchronicity, coincidence or was it just a reminder for us all that, whatever we do and however we do it, we are all connected and therefore we need to keep each other in our prayers always?

Dee Boyle is a member of St Saviourgate Chapel, York.

Ullet Road celebrated the hero within

By Angela Howard

Before we were Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Quakers, Unitarians, Jews, Pagans...we were humans. The funny thing is we still are; we have just forgotten it! – Source unknown.

That is a quote from our interfaith celebration by and for LGBT people of faith and their friends hosted by Ullet Road Unitarian Church and Liverpool Spectrum of Spirituality, a forum of LGBT people of faith and the groups which support them.

- Our vision is of a world where people do not have to choose between their spirituality and their sexuality or gender identity.
- Our mission is to transform our world by making sacred space for LGBT people in all our faith communities.
- We come together in the spirit of co-operation, embracing the challenges of differences by celebrating our shared values of respect, acceptance and diversity.

The title of this year's gathering, 'The Hero Within', was inspired by this year's Liverpool Pride theme, 'Superheroes'. And what a gathering it was! We gave offerings from six different faith traditions reflecting what the 'Hero Within' meant to them; Pagan, Jewish, Quaker, Christian, Buddhist and Native American Spiritual traditions. Candles were lit after each offering as a symbol of our faith as a light.

We created a large prism showing white light refracted into



There was a great turnout for the Pride service at Ullet Road Church.

the colours of the rainbow, the inspiration for the name Spectrum of Spirituality. We wrote down our dreams, hopes, prayers, reflections: what the hero inside meant to each one of us. These were put inside the prism and carried on the Pride March the following Saturday. Afterwards, we shared a drink and a wonderful vegetarian buffet in the cloisters! A most moving experience.

Angela Howard is lay-minister at Ullet Road Church.